

ROCK CREEK BULLETIN

A Newsletter of Rock Creek Park

Volume 1, Fall 1999



A Message From the Superintendent

I would like to introduce you to the inaugural edition of *The Rock Creek Park Newsletter*. Since its creation in 1890, Rock Creek Park has provided visitors with a setting to explore the natural and cultural heritage of Washington while enjoying many recreational opportunities. This newsletter is intended to enhance your access to and understanding of this special place.

Rock Creek Park is more than a forest. It is a window to understanding the natural world in which we live. It preserves tangible evidence of 5,000 years of human interaction with the land. It provides opportunities for restoring body and soul through passive and active recreation in a beautiful setting. The park's Civil War forts and battleground, memorials, gristmill, Colonial home, planetarium, ancient quarries, nature center, amphitheater, ornately landscaped gardens and wealth of natural ecosystems, are made all the more special because of their location in the center of a bustling metropolis. Days spent exploring Rock Creek Park will bring you into contact with much of this world.

Each issue will have a theme. This issue focuses on wildlife in Rock Creek Park, and in particular two park residents- the beaver and the white-tailed deer. Let us know what other Rock Creek Park topics you would like to read about here.

With this and subsequent editions of the newsletter I hope that you will be able to continue to explore and enjoy Rock Creek Park long after your visit.

Welcome to Rock Creek Park!

General Management Plan Update:

Due to reorganization of the National Park Service's national planning office, the Rock Creek Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS) has been on hold. However, preparation of the draft GMP/EIS is once again underway, and it will be released for public review in the near future. We will let you know as soon as the draft is available for comment.

White-Tailed Deer Activity, Increasing?



In response to increased deer sightings and concerns for possible vegetation damage, the park has conducted several activities to estimate the deer population and their impacts in Rock Creek Park. The following is a list of activities and their results:

Deer Monitoring Plots - Twenty-seven vegetation plots are being monitored for deer impact to native plants. Results to date indicate light to modest impact on park woodlands. In addition to the vegetation monitoring plots, park personnel will install deer exclosures throughout the park to further evaluate impacts on park vegetation. Infrared Survey -A helicopter infrared survey was contracted in March 1998 which estimated 90 deer in Rock Creek. These surveys rely

on heat images and are about 75 percent accurate or better, three years in row achieving similar results.

Spotlight Counts - Spotlight counts of deer performed in the falls of 1996, 1997 and 1998 revealed similar numbers for 1999 showed a slight increase from previous years, but is not accurate enough to draw conclusions from.

Deer-vehicle Collisions - The total known deer-vehicle collisions for 1997 were 30, in 1998-20 and currently 22 in 1999..

What You Can Do

Report: Any deer killed by vehicle collisions or carcasses seen along park roads and trails to (202) 426-6834 ext. 31. If a deer is struck but not killed call U. S. Park Police at (202) 619-7300 if in the park, and D.C. Animal Control if outside the park at (202) 576-6664.

While driving in and around the park: Slow down if you see a deer crossing a road because it may suddenly leap into your path, and be aware that others are likely to follow. Slow down wherever you see "deer crossing" signs. Keep a keen lookout around dawn and dusk when deer are most active.

To protect your landscaping consider: 1) Repellents which can be effective if damage is light or just beginning (To find out more information on deer repellents call Ken Ferebee at 202-426-6834 ext. 31), 2) plant native plants not preferred by deer, 3) erect fences which are at least 10 feet tall, and/or 4) cover plants with netting.

These tips may keep you safer and help prevent damage to your property and car. Reporting deer-vehicle collisions will assist the park in determining information about the deer populations. At this time it has not been determined if the deer population is increasing significantly or if their numbers have reached a level that requires active intervention. The park can provide information and answer questions you may have concerning deer at (202) 426-6834 ext. 31.

Beavers in Rock Creek Park

During the summer of 1997 and 1998, resource management crews surveyed for beaver activity along the entire length of Rock Creek and its major tributaries. Crews searched for any beaver sign - live or dead animals, foot or tail prints, slides where the beavers had entered and left the creek, and vegetation that had been cut or chewed. Results were compared with previous surveys that had been completed in 1983 and 1988. Results indicate that beavers use all of Rock Creek north of the National Zoo to the Maryland border. Cut or gnawed vegetation was found mostly within 10 meters (30 feet) of the water's edge, but some was as far away as 30 meters. There were five areas that had been used intensively within the park.

There is no indication that beaver activity increased over the decade since the last survey. However, the species of trees and shrubs eaten has changed somewhat. It appears that the beavers have eaten all their favorite species - willow (*Salix spp*) and alder (*Alnus spp*). The structure of the creek may naturally limit the population and deter dam building. However, some of the larger tributaries might prove attractive to beaver in the future. Periodic monitoring efforts are expected to continue. Guidelines for dealing with beaver activities that threaten human structures will be developed, based on best available expert advice and National Park Service Policy, and public input. Your comments are welcome; please contact Sue Salmons at 202-426-6834.



Visit our park web page at www.nps.gov/rocr



Contributors to this issue:

Sue Salmons
Ken Ferebee
Julia Washburn

Editor: Dan Winings

To make comments or to be added to the mailing list e-mail
Dan_Winings@nps.gov